

Guidance on the Consultative Process

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is committed to the consultative process as a core element of Compact development and implementation. Development literature and the experience of practitioners have confirmed that public participation results in programs that better reflect national priorities and have a higher likelihood of success. In addition, the legislation establishing MCC requires that “in entering into a Compact, the United States shall seek to ensure that the government of an eligible country (1) takes into account the local-level perspectives of the rural and urban poor, including women, in the eligible country; and (2) consults with private and voluntary organizations, the business community, and other donors in the eligible country.” Over the last year, MCC has been learning more about consultative processes from its partner countries, development experts, and other individuals with views on the subject. This guidance is designed to help MCC’s partners and MCC evaluate consultative processes – MCC welcomes comments on this guidance so that we can further refine it.

The principle of “country ownership” is central to MCC’s approach to development. MCC seeks to strengthen domestic processes within a country and believes a foundation for true country ownership is participation by ordinary citizens in a consultative process. MCC defines ownership as eligible countries, our partners, identifying, developing and prioritizing their own development strategies and programs and not having this done by MCC or other donors. MCC expects governments in eligible countries to manage a transparent ongoing process that provides opportunities for citizens to have input into the identification, prioritization and design of development programs proposed for MCC funding. An effective country-owned process should be one that is locally-owned, supported by the people, and provides feedback on the decision-making process and the decisions made. Further, countries should conduct project-level consultations and include participation in implementation.

Consultation Objectives

A good consultative process is (1) timely, (2) participatory, and (3) meaningful. A *timely process* is ongoing; governments should therefore ensure a) wide initial discussion of the program, b) ongoing feedback on and the rationale for decisions made throughout the process, c) project-level consultations with potential beneficiaries or potentially affected parties during program development, d) public participation during implementation, and f) broad dissemination of information related to the program to permit informed citizen oversight. A *participatory process* takes into account a broad range of views. In addition to engaging government officials and legislators at the national and local levels, countries should ensure that representatives from local and international non-governmental organizations, large and small enterprises in the private sector and rural and urban civil society groups are aware of the opportunity to participate in consultations to shape their country’s MCA program. A *meaningful process* allows citizens to have genuine input into the process.

For their part, organizations that participate in the process must realize that being consulted does not mean that a given organization’s proposed project or particular point of view will necessarily be included or reflected in the final proposal.

The legislation establishing MCC requires that “the Compact should take into account the national development strategy of the eligible country.” A country’s national development strategy or Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) can form the initial basis for the MCA proposal. However, in those cases, countries should continue public dialogue associated with these national plans and provide feedback and justification on how and why priorities for MCA assistance were identified from that national development strategy or PRSP.

Country Approaches to Consultations

MCC recognizes that each country is unique and should develop a methodology that best suits its environment to ensure a timely, participatory and meaningful consultative process. Therefore eligible countries have used a number of ways to stimulate participation including:

- Information dissemination through television, radio, the internet, and newspapers
- Public awareness/information campaigns using local organizations
- Inter-active discussions at town hall meetings, speaking tours, round-table discussions, and question and answer sessions
- Information gathering through direct discussions and focus groups
- Requests for written input (letters and public comments) which can be compiled and analyzed
- Consultations through local representative organizations such as “development councils”
- Project level consultations with stakeholders directly affected by the proposed projects

Participation is also being formally structured into the long-term implementation of a Compact:

- Civil society/private sector (rotating or permanent) representation on MCA governing structures
- Establishment of Public/Private Advisory Boards
- Public participation in monitoring

Countries may want to work with NGOs, private sector organizations, or other groups with experience in consultative processes for guidance on a consultation strategy.

MCC’s Evaluation of Consultations

MCC will review the quality and content of the consultative process as one component of its due diligence, which also evaluates other key factors such as whether the proposal will lead to poverty reduction through economic growth, the costs of a project, fiscal accountability, etc. The following are illustrative questions that MCC may consider during its due diligence process in assessing whether a consultative process is timely, participatory and meaningful:

Timely:

The consultative process is ideally initiated at the conceptual stage of the program's development -- that is, prior to a country's initial prioritization of its impediments to growth and poverty reduction -- and should continue throughout implementation of the Compact. In this regard, the following illustrative questions are relevant:

1. What types of consultations were carried out and at what points during the process? Did they include:
 - a. Wide initial discussion of the program
 - b. Clear and ongoing feedback on the process and the program
 - c. Project level consultations with potential beneficiaries and potentially affected parties during program development
 - d. Planning for public participation during implementation
 - e. Planning for broad dissemination of information related to the program to permit informed citizen oversight
2. Were consultations conducted early enough in the process to inform priorities?
3. Were consultations conducted prior to the submission of the MCC proposal?
4. How will consultations continue through the implementation phase?

Participatory

Consultations should encompass a broad representation of society, including but not limited to rural and urban poor, women, private and voluntary organizations, the business community, legislative bodies, and other potential stakeholders. In reviewing this aspect of the consultative process, the following illustrative questions are relevant:

1. Was there a strategy to encourage broad involvement? If yes, describe. Did the government identify any resource constraints? If so, what steps were taken to address them?
2. Were materials provided that were comprehensible and legible in language(s) to allow for true participation of all stakeholders?
3. How were various groups involved in the consultative process? To what extent were these groups involved?
4. How were women's associations and women consulted? Were rural and urban poor groups consulted? Was the private sector consulted? Were PVO and NGO groups consulted? Were legislative bodies consulted?
5. How were participants identified?
6. Did potential participants know about the process and how to participate? Were the locations, times, and notification of the consultations appropriate to ensure broad based participation?
7. Did participants' input shape the program design to ensure that intended beneficiaries --both men and women -- would be reached by the proposed program?
8. Did members of government and/or MCA National Council participate in any/all meetings?

9. Were there multiple levels of consultations - national, regional, project - if applicable?
10. How many venues did the consultative process entail and were potential participants provided meaningful access?
11. Was the media employed to communicate how citizens could engage in the consultative process? Did the government share the outcomes of the consultations? If so, how?
12. Which donors were consulted to ensure coordination?
13. What types of outside support, if any, were sought to assist with the consultative process?
14. How did the country inform MCC and solicit informal feedback from MCC during the consultative process?
15. Has the government publicized the proposal submitted to MCC?

Meaningful

Consultations should reflect a genuine attempt by the government to consider a broad range of views in developing a country's priorities and not serve just as a rubber stamp. The consultative process should reflect an ongoing dialogue among various stakeholders, the product of which reflects broad input of ideas on obstacles to growth and potential MCC objectives. In this regard, the following illustrative questions are relevant:

1. Were consultations focused on obstacles to economic growth and poverty reduction and strategies to address these obstacles?
2. Were materials disseminated in advance of meetings to allow for review?
3. Was there enough time allotted to collect and analyze the results of the consultative process so that it could accurately be reflected in the prioritization and content of the proposal?
4. How was/is the public input reflected in the proposal?
5. Were the content and results of the consultations documented in any manner?
6. Are there clear linkages between the consultative process outcomes and the content of the country's MCC proposal?
7. Was feedback provided to participants on what the government proposed to MCC?
8. Did the government explain how and why it chose the priorities in the proposal?
9. Was the public provided an opportunity to review and comment on draft proposals prior to submission?

The above examples and due diligence questions illustrate possible approaches to the Consultative Process for determining the content of Compact proposals. Comments and questions are welcome and should be directed to the relevant country officers at MCC or by email to: MCCDevelopmentPolicy@mcc.gov.